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GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR; NEW DELHI

MEDIA REACTION: IRAQ

1. "INCONCLUSIVE ELECTIONS IN IRAQ: AT LAST, AMERICA'S
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VERDICT WILL PREVAIL!" editorial in the December 23, 2005,
Mumbai edition of the centrist Gujarati daily GUJARATMITRA.
"After having had accepted that the U.S. intelligence
reports on Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction were
bogus, President Bush has been showering praise on Iraq for
moving towards a democratic form of governance. However,
the elections in Iraq have been inconclusive, as no party
has got a clear mandate to form a government. Despite
reports of large-scale malpractice in the elections,
incumbent Iraqi President Jamal Talibani has described this
as a fair and transparent exercise. Whatever may be the
case, one cannot deny the fact that America's calculations
in the strife-torn region have gone wrong from day one.
Secondly, President Bush is desperately trying to score
points in Iraq, as it will boost his popularity ratings,
which have been plummeting, back home. On the other hand,
the U.S. wants Iraq to be a secular nation. However, the
reality is that Iraq remains a more ethnically divided
nation under the U.S.-led coalition forces than it used to
be under former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Although the
U.S. can take credit for holding the first-ever democratic
elections in Iraq, there seems to be a remote possibility of
peace emerging from this electoral exercise in this region.
President Bush's dream of starting the process of
withdrawal of troops still has a long way to go. The
elections have delivered a fractured verdict. Thus, the
decisive ballot eventually rests with America."

2. "CAESAR IN THE VORTEX OF DOUBTS; SADDAM'S DUBIOUS TRIAL
AND DISCREDITED CIA" editorial in the December 23, 2005,
Mumbai edition of left-of-center Marathi daily LOKSATTA.
". The U.S. administration apparently doesn't believe in
the old saying that Caesar's wife should be above suspicion
when it comes to dispelling doubts about one's integrity and
character. No wonder: the U.S. does not even feel the need
to be seen as fair and just. That's precisely why the
American administration is not bothered to ensure a
semblance of credibility for the U.S.-orchestrated kangaroo
court in Iraq. Of course, that does not stop former
dictator Saddam Hussein from uncovering America's mask. He
openly alleged in the court that he was a victim of

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extensive beatings and torture by his American captors during his 'show trial.' The former Iraqi president indicated that he and many other Baath Party officials are being tortured by the very forces promising to bring rule of law to Iraq. The media coverage of Saddam Hussein's trial is also not above board. The hardly-audible telecasts of Hussein's latest allegations only point towards heavy censorship exercised by the makers of the 'new Iraq'. One can understand President George W. Bush's keen desire to finish off during his last tenure the task he has set for himself all along since the invasion of Iraq-- to hang

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Saddam Hussein. But shouldn't he be at least trying to put a good gloss on Saddam's 'show trial?' . The Central Intelligence Agency is another organization, which couldn't care less for its credibility while working at the behest of

the U.S. President, especially post 9/11. This top American intelligence agency has allegedly held and tortured terror suspects in secret facilities in former Soviet-Union member countries. The CIA is said to have used airports in Britain as well as other European countries while carrying out what is called 'extra-ordinary rendition' of suspected terrorists. Human rights organizations have also suggested that the CIA ran secret prisons, known as 'black sites,' in Poland and Romania. That adds many more chapters to the Abu Graib torture episode."

----- WTO HONG KONG MINISTERIAL -----

3. "HONG KONG: MICRO STEPS, BUT FIRM ONES," analysis in December 23 pro-economic reforms THE ECONOMIC TIMES by economist Biswajit Dhar.

a. "The sixth ministerial conference of the WTO held in Hong Kong extricated itself from the depths of what was almost written off as a non-event only a few weeks before it was convened to one that has kept the pots simmering as far as the Doha Round is concerned. The ministerial declaration adopted at the end of the conference has been so conjured up that it has in it to keep each of the 149 members of the organization looking forward to the first quarter of 2006 when something substantial in terms of the movement forward on this round of negotiations is expected. Many close observers of the WTO from the developing world would argue that the ministerial declaration does little to assuage the countries that they represent ... But what needs to be pointed out is that by standing by the 'July framework', the

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Hong Kong declaration has raised the pitch on the prominent issues, while at the same time providing them with a stronger legal basis. The deal clincher in Hong Kong was the agreement for the removal of export subsidies. While most countries wanted to eliminate this form of subsidies by the end of the decade, the EU, the largest users of export subsidies, sought a longer phase-out period. The agreed end-date of 2013 gives the EU its level of comfort ... The scene now shifts to the two other pillars of the WTO agreement on agriculture (AoA), viz., domestic subsidies and market access, both of which are of critical importance to the developing countries. As regards market access, the Hong Kong declaration mandates that the adoption of four bands for effecting tariff cuts ... But the more important component of the market access mandate given by the ministers in Hong Kong for countries like India is the inclusion of the special products (SPs) and special safeguard mechanism (SSM).

b. "Reduction of production related subsidies, the so-called domestic support, poses the toughest challenge to developing countries since developed countries rely heavily on this form of subsidies to distribute the largesse ...

In the area of non-agricultural market access, India and several other developing countries have argued that the flexibilities in the application of the formula would constitute its most critical component, and this sentiment has found a reflection in the Hong Kong ministerial declarations ... The focus of the current round of

negotiations on issues concerning the developing countries has had a salutary effect on the coalitions involving these countries which have gathered momentum over time. Hong Kong saw the culmination of this process as the 'grand alliance' involving the G-90, the G-33 and the G-20 countries took shape. This alliance almost gave the impression that the dynamics of trade negotiations have started to shift away from the developed countries. Trade negotiators would tell us that these negotiations have the potential of becoming the art of the impossible. And the global community would have to wait for the next three months to know whether this is so."

INDO-U.S. RELATIONSBUSH VISIT

4. "USING THE BUSH VISIT," analysis in the December 23 pro-economic reforms BUSINESS STANDARD by T Thomas.

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a. " George W Bush will be completing his second and last term as the US president in 2008. He is scheduled to visit the Indian subcontinent early next year. It is therefore appropriate for us to think of how India should make use of the remaining years of his presidency. The declared focus of President Bush has been the spread of democracy and freedom in the world. Therefore, these are the most obvious showcases for him in India. He should first be made aware of the diversity of our country ... We have been able to hold together under a democratic form of government for the last 60 years. If Bush wanted proof of the validity of democracy, what better example than India! ... He will probably address a joint session of Parliament. But perhaps even more important for his education will be to see and listen to a session of the Lok Sabha from the visitors' gallery. He will be so relieved to see that, as President of the US, he does not have to face a Parliament like ours for so many days each year!... One of the outstanding features of India is the importance of religion and yet the mutual tolerance of different religious groups. A flying visit to the ghats in Varanasi will demonstrate the depth of tolerance, and a visit, however brief, to a home for the destitute run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity will show how tolerant, appreciative and supportive people are of the work of Christian missionaries. Most of the support to the Missionaries of Charity come from Hindus devoutly committed to their religion but who believe in helping the poor.

b. "A heartwarming sight in any part of India is that of streams of children in their school uniforms, wending their way each morning with their bags of books. Mr. Bush must visit a municipal school in Mumbai to realize how even the poorest families value education for their children ... The other end of the spectrum for the visit would be the high-tech beacons of India. One of the IITs and the Electronic City in Bangalore the Silicon Plateau of India should be a must on his itinerary. There he must see the IT centers of IBM and the campuses of the big three Indian IT companies (TCS, Infosys, and Wipro). They constitute a piece of the US in India ... George Bush is a practising Christian and he will find it heartwarming to know how Christianity arrived in India with St Thomas and how it has survived in this country for 2,000 years. A flying visit to Kerala will show him how churches and temples co-exist in each town and

people respect each other's beliefs. The other major feature of India that needs to be impressed on Mr. Bush is how our armed forces are subject to control by elected ministers and civil servants in a democratic set-up. This is in sharp

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contrast to all our neighboring countries. Now, what should India seek to gain from George Bush's visit? First, like most of us, an understanding about the size and shape of a country becomes potent only when we visit that country ... He has just been to Japan and China. Asia has three really important and distinct spheres, viz. Japan, China, and India. Almost all the countries in Asia are sub-regions of these three. This visit will certainly show him the magnitude of the cultural influence of India in this region and how small other countries in this region (Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia, etc.) are in comparison with India.

c. "He would also realize that India is not such a close ally of Russia. In fact, his newfound friends in China have greater economic and political links with Russia than India does. India has a vibrant private sector, which constitutes an overwhelming part of the economy and is more linked to Europe and the US than Russia. India and the US have complementary economies and are therefore natural allies. The US has the advantage of technology while India can offer a large and growing market for products of that technology, and it has low cost-manufacturing capabilities that can exploit US technology more effectively for the world market. By lowering trade and visa barriers, business groups on both sides will find ways of exploiting these complementarities to the advantage of both countries. The US can offer much greater assistance in education, especially in engineering and management studies ... On our part, India should become less critical and show more understanding towards US positions in its international relations. In the past we have been eager to criticize and slow to show appreciation of US positions. This has to change demonstrably. The mullahs of Iran and Islamist terrorists in Pakistan and elsewhere are as much a threat to India as they are to the US. Even if we do not participate in military action along with the US, what we can do is to refrain from airing unfriendly opinions in public. Today the US is the only superpower in the world and it is going to be so for the foreseeable future. It is in our own interest to recognize this and seek areas of complementarity with the US."

----- INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS -----

5. "TWO BUS ROUTES AND A FEW QUESTIONS," analysis in the December 23 left-of-center THE HINDU by Islamabad correspondent B. Muralidhar Reddy. " Two separate agreements between India and Pakistan on Wednesday to provide bus services connecting Amritsar with Nankana Sahib (birthplace

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of Guru Nanak) and Lahore came as great news for the people of Punjab on either side of the divide. The general expectation during the third round of technical level talks between officials of the two countries at Lahore was that the agreement on a Lahore-Amritsar bus service would be sealed and the talks on Nankana Sahib-Amritsar service would spill over to at least another session. But both materialized in one meeting. With this, the number of bus services between the two countries will increase to four. At

present, buses ply between Delhi and Lahore, and Muzaffarabad and Srinagar. The Samjauta Express connects the two countries by train, and Lahore, Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai are linked by air. The developments reflect the desire of the leadership of both the countries to forge a new era in promoting people-to-people contacts. But to make the new services meaningful and truly people-oriented, the two Governments need to take a look at the fare structure and ensure visas are made available easily. The bus fares for the new services have taken away the charm of the bonhomie generated by the confidence building measures (CBMs). The one-way fare of Pakistani Rs.900 and Indian Rs.750 for the less than 45 km travel between Amritsar and Lahore, and of Pakistani Rs.1200 and Indian Rs.1000 for the just over 100 km Amritsar-Nankana Sahib route essentially meant for Sikh pilgrims smack of an anti-poor mindset. In contrast, the fare on the Samjauta Express that runs between Lahore and Wagah (less than 20 km from Amritsar) is Pakistani Rs.50 and Indian Rs.35 ... Another issue pertains to visas. There have been demands on both sides for either consulates or visa camp offices in Lahore and Amritsar to help people obtain visas. So far, there is no proposal for visa facilities in Lahore, Amritsar or other cities ... If both sides are serious about promotion of people-to-people contacts, a liberalized visa regime is a must. Even if Pakistan is not ready for a liberalized visa regime, India should take the lead."

----- GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR -----

6. "CAUSE OF OUR PRESENT TERRORS," op-ed in December 23 centrist THE STATESMAN by columnist Jonathan Power: "If
If
only the Soviets had been left alone to face what would have been a long war of attrition by local forces armed with their own more elementary weaponry, we would probably have never have seen the rise of Al-Qaida from its protected redoubt in Afghanistan. Nor would Pakistan's conflict with

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India over Kashmir have become so difficult to halt. Pakistan would not have been allowed to become a nuclear weapons' state. Critics of Pakistan's present-day embrace of militant Islam forget that it all began when the then President Zia ul Haq, facing domestic resistance from the secular parties to his alliance with the USA, forged an alliance with Sunni extremist groups. This led to the steady Islamisation of many facets of Pakistani life, not least the distortion of Pakistan's legal system and provided militant clergy with unprecedented access to political power. The West's obsessive anti-Soviet policies during the Cold War meant that Afghanis, Pakistanis, Indians (and Vietnamese, Cambodians, Angolans, Somalis and the Central Americans et al) paid a high price in war and carnage, whilst we in the West got on with our economic growth and social development. But now the mistakes of the pro-jihadist, Cold War warriors have come to haunt us all. Are we any more ready than we were then to stop the myopic policies of today's decision-makers breaking the glass for the next generation to have to pick up?"

Blake

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